

Anglican Fellowship of Prayer (Canada)

PARISH HOUSE GROUPS



Anglican Fellowship of Prayer Canada
www.anglicanprayer.org

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Introduction to Parish House Groups

People meet in small groups in many different circumstances in order to accomplish a variety of things. Christians form small groups for various reasons. Parish House Groups (variously called by names such as Cell Groups, Cells, Care Groups) are a particular form of a small Christian group. This Booklet has been produced to give the reader a general overview of Parish House Groups, and to provide answers to often-asked questions.

Why Have Parish House Groups? What is Their Purpose?

- X Meeting once a week on Sunday for worship and coffee hour does not meet all our spiritual and social needs. It is difficult to meet and get to know everyone on Sundays or on an occasional basis at other church activities.
- X Parish House Groups can help us come to know one another better, and to grow as Christians in an informal setting.
- X In addition to building a greater **sense of community** in the Parish, House Groups provide a way to **support each other** and to **know God better** through others.

What Happens At Group Meetings? What Do They Do?

Every House Group gathering should include each of the following elements:

- X Praying together;
- X Study (Bible or some other Christian study);
- X Members sharing with others where they are in their spiritual journey;
- X Members offering support and encouragement to each other; and
- X Action and Ministry beyond the internal life of the group. It will take some time for the group to decide its focus, but this is an important part of a Parish House Group's activity. (See Pgs. 5/6)

How Often Do They Meet? How Long Are the Meetings?

Parish House Groups should meet at least twice a month to provide continuity in building on relationships which have formed in the group. Given people's busy schedules today it is often difficult to meet more often. Meetings (not including meals) are usually about 1 1/2 to 2 hours long.

- X Some groups have a pot-luck meal together - others do not.

- X Some groups include children - some have children sometimes - some have no children at their meetings. Babysitting may need to be arranged or shared by members.

- X Some groups meet at the same place each time - others vary the place where they meet.

How Will These Groups Be Organized?

Informally. The groups consist of 6-12 persons who meet regularly in one of the parishioners' homes. Leadership for the meetings is usually rotated among the members so no one person becomes burdened with preparations each time they meet. The group plans its own meetings.

At the initial gathering decisions are made by the group on such matters as:

- X When it will meet;

- X Where it will meet i.e. at one member's house, rotating amongst several houses, or at another location;

X How often it will meet; and

X How leadership will be shared during the meetings.

Size Limits. Groups should be between 6-12 persons. Experience has shown that house groups lose their effectiveness if they become smaller or larger than this. If numbers get beyond 12 then the group should divide into two and these newly formed groups welcome newcomers.

Who Can Join. No special qualifications are needed. Parish House Groups normally consist of parishioners from one parish. Members are welcome to invite interested friends, neighbours and family. Groups are intended to be as diverse as the parish as a whole - families, singles, adults, youth - all are welcome. Once a group has been formed, the whole group should be consulted and agree before newcomers are invited to join as members.

Designated Coordinators. Although leadership is shared within the group - sharing the responsibility for planning and conducting the meetings - there should be a designated "Coordinator" for each group. When there is more than one group in a parish, it is important that the groups stay connected with the parish and each other. The group Coordinators will meet together monthly under the pastoral support and guidance of the Parish Priest. Together they will form the coordinating body which provides the resources, support and encouragement in the growth of the Parish Home Groups. As a group nears the upper limit in numbers, its Coordinator should seek to develop an assistant who can take over when the group divides.

Caution

Parish House Groups **must never become a substitute for regular attendance at parish worship services and parish gatherings.** They are intended to supplement and enrich regular parish activities, not replace them.

What Action Can the Group Take Beyond Itself? (Future Ministries For House Groups)

Varied. There are all kinds of possibilities for developing active ministries outside of the House Group. This is part of our purpose and it is important that each group look for and take action in performing some sort of ministry outside of itself. The opportunities are endless, but sometimes too much choice invites paralysis. Choose one thing that all members of the group want to participate in and go for it!

Hospitality. Some outside ministries may be social in nature - with the focus on Christian hospitality. A House Group might decide to provide opportunities for new people to come to know others in the parish and to ask questions about the Christian life we share.

Exploring the Christian Faith. A Group outside ministry might centre on helping those who are inquiring about how the Christian faith applies to modern day issues. Increasing numbers of people today are struggling with questions and are "looking again" at the Christian faith as a resource for living.

First Stages of a Faith Journey. Another possible ministry is to focus on the preparation for Baptism and first Communion. Guiding parents and children preparing for these significant stages in their faith journey is important.

Deepening Christian Faith and Individual Ministry. A group could focus on helping parishioners identify their "God-given Gifts" and how to apply those gifts. The group could provide help and support as people discover how they can use their gifts in developing their individual ministries.

Teaching. A group might take on the responsibility of researching a spiritual, biblical, theological or moral topic, and coordinate a seminar or other learning opportunity for the parish.



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For further information or pamphlets please contact your AFP Diocesan Representative or AFP Canada: www.anglicanprayer.org

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